

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



NUMBER 201, FEBRUARY 2010

www.sbsg.org.uk

Bulletin

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Breeding Atlas update

The writing of the species accounts has begun and such is the dedication of the authors that some even forsook the opportunity to go for glory in the "January Challenge" instead devoting precious time to the task in hand. Well at least that's my excuse for languishing in the 80s.

Early progress also in the search for funding. Sales of Brick Budgie's CD: "Trouble at Millet" have raised around £320 so far. £380 has already been received in species sponsorship with a further £280 pledged. Very many thanks to all those who have got involved so far.

Well that's just about the first thousand pounds seen to. Just another £8,000 or so to go. We live in cash-strapped times

but David Wood and Pete Brown will pursue what is possible with funding applications and of course the usual stance is that potential funders will ask for some form of matched funding. So in the meantime, if you haven't already done so, please consider giving £20 to sponsor a species if you can afford to. There are still loads of cracking birds to go for: Goshawk, Buzzard, Kingfisher, all the chats and thrushes and all bar one of the warblers to mention but a few. There's got be at least one species that's special to you. Feral Pigeon anyone?

To sponsor a species get in touch with **P e t e B r o w n** (peterbrown@blueyonder.co.uk) or 01142967363 or better still come brandishing a cheque book at an indoor



meeting.

Pete Brown

January challenge results

In January some of the area's most dedicated birders took part in the contest of all contests - the SBSG January challenge, a friendly rivalry to see who could record the most number of species in the Sheffield area before the end of the month.

Considering the icy start to the year, the contestants reached some phenomenal figures, with Martin Garner just pipping Pete Wragg to

first place, with a very impressive 115 species. The final league table is as follows:

Martin Garner - 115
Pete Wragg - 114
Malcolm Oxlade - 112
Mark Reeder - 111
Andy Deighton - 109
Mike Fenner - 101
Bill Bailey - 100
Richard Hill - 91

Duncan Bye - 88

David Williams, who crunched the numbers in this nail-biting clash of birding titans, said: "Congratulations, and my admiration to everyone".

Some impressive birds were seen by the contestants, including firecrest, bittern, Cetti's warbler and Caspian gull.

OBITUARY - Marcus Moore 1922-2009

Members, especially those who were around in the formative years of the Sheffield Bird Study Group, will be much saddened to hear that Marcus Moore, a founder member and Past Chairman, died on 23rd November after a long period of illness.

To those of us in Sheffield who were active on the bird-watching scene in the early 1970's, Marcus was important for working alongside his wife, Betty, and staff from the RSPB in getting the annual RSPB Film shows up and running at the City Hall. He subsequently played a leading role in establishing the SBSG, served as its first Chairman and was the Joint Sheffield Area Representative of the RSPB.

Marcus had a long and busy life which began on the 20th October, 1922 in Barrow, Cumbria. At the start of the Second World War Marcus entered the Signals Regiment and then subsequently volunteered for training as a parachutist within that regiment. He was one of the first to be dropped across the Channel the night before the onset of D-Day to put down lights at specific targets and generally create havoc behind enemy lines whilst the invasion was underway and Allied gliders were being released over France. He also has another claim to fame in that after 18 days of action he was seriously wounded and would have lost his right arm if he hadn't been one of the first servicemen to receive injections of the then new 'wonder drug', Penicillin, administered personally by Lady Florey. The hospital to which he was sent to convalesce was only five miles from where his future wife, Betty, was based as she studied for a degree in Maths at London University. They became an 'item' during Marcus' long convalescence and were married in February, 1945. He was then sent to Malaya, to fight against the Japanese. Fortunately this coincided with the dropping of the two Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shortly afterwards Marcus was demobbed and returned to Britain.

At the end of the war he took up a place at Bristol University reading for a Civil Engineering degree and from Bristol the Moores moved to Derby where Marcus worked for a large engineering firm and Betty was a Mathematics Lecturer. They remained in Derby for four years before moving to Sheffield and a delightful house at Dore.

It was in the mid 1960's that I first met Betty through our membership of the Sorby Natural History Society. We started regular outings to the coast and our interest in bird watching became an obsession. Our knowledge of birds increased as we journeyed to and fro in one of Betty's several Triumph Heralds.

The organization of birding in Sheffield at that time was virtually moribund and there were a number of small cliques of active bird watchers, these cliques were very hard to break into. Though other parts of the Sorby Natural History Society were extremely active, notably the Botanical and Entomological Sections the same could not be said of the Ornithological Section. We recognized a growing need for a separate organization devoted solely to birds.

In the late 1960's Marcus and Betty became joint organizers of the annual RSPB Film Shows based at the Sheffield City Hall, These had become more and more popular and very well attended. In the early 1970's Marcus and Betty were proposed as Joint Representatives for the RSPB in Sheffield by Trevor Gunton, who, had risen within the ranks of the RSPB as their Sales and Publicity Officer.

It was at the latter end of the 1960's and in the beginning of the 1970's that this and a series of other events changed the direction of ornithology in Sheffield forever. The annual RSPB Film Shows held at the Sheffield City Hall had proved an outstanding success, not only in raising the flag for the RSPB locally but also in providing a location where, once a year, members and non-members, keen amateur ornithologists and those with only a vague interest in birds but who were compulsive gardeners or active walkers could meet together, purchase Christmas cards and other RSPB goods from the sales stall, which seemed to grow larger year by year at the front of the City Hall. All of this was master-minded by Betty and Marcus Moore!

It thus became increasingly obvious that there was a very great need for a separate organization where people could meet, discuss, have talks, carry out surveys, become involved in bird protection and conservation and build up a constantly up-dated set of information on Sheffield birds.

In late 1972 during a meeting held between myself, Betty and Marcus at the Moore's Dore home, Marcus suggested that we should establish such a separate organization with the aims of providing a forum for the recording, studying and conservation of local birds. On the 14th December, 1972 a public meeting was held in the City Museum, Weston Park and the Sheffield Bird Study Group came into existence with Marcus Moore as our first Chairman.

So by 1973 Marcus was now in place chairing a newly formed Sheffield Bird Study Group and bringing around him very able local birders as members of a

support Committee. Sheffield ornithology never looked back! An annual Report, called originally *The Sheffield Bird Report* and now renamed *The Birds of the Sheffield Area* was published at the end of 1973 and continues to this day, the issue covering 2008 has just been printed.

Marcus remained as a hugely popular Chairman until 1978 when he passed the baton over to Keith, V. Tayles. In 1977 Marcus gave up as a Manager of a large steel plant in Tamworth and became the Secretary for the Sheffield Royal Institute for the Blind. Betty remained involved with local birding both carrying out Water Way Birds Surveys on the Derwent and also helping in the protection of Goshawk and other species – though less so than earlier. In 1987 Marcus retired and Betty and Marcus moved to a lovely house at Cwm Ystwyth, Central Wales where Betty was able to watch her beloved birds of prey – notably the Red Kites, but also Goshawks and others. Marcus took up a new found interest in gardening which became very much a labour of love often remaining in their lovely Welsh garden from dawn to dusk.

Sadly, Marcus became one of many afflicted by Alzheimer's Disease and at the latter end of their time in Wales he was much affected. Marcus and Betty returned to Sheffield in 2004 to be near their daughter, Maureen. In 2009 Marcus went into a nursing home for the last few months remaining him.

We should be very grateful for what Marcus did for us. Never much more than 'interested' himself but certainly bowled over by his wife Betty's enthusiasm for birds and the natural environment and also becoming very aware of the growing need for their conservation. He was in exactly the right place at the right time to act as a catalyst, bringing a number of enthusiasts together to form the Sheffield Bird Study Group. His actions taken in 1972 have had an enormous effect on the development of Sheffield ornithology 38 years later. Our sympathy goes out to his wife, Betty, son David, daughter Maureen and their families. He will be much missed.

Dave Herringshaw

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Paul Medforth - A visit to Costa Rica

Wed 13th March 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

A well-known and popular member of the group, not least of all for his sterling efforts organising the SBSG minibus field-trips, Paul will be taking us even further afield with this talk on Costa Rica. The country is a species-rich paradise - which is home to 5% of the world's entire biodiversity - and Paul will be guiding us through the country's amazing birdlife.

This indoor meeting is also the group's AGM.

Stephen Murphy - Hen Harriers

Wed 13th April 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Stephen Murphy is an ornithologist for Natural England, working to protect hen harriers, especially in the successful breeding site of the Forest of Bowland in Lancashire. Stephen will be sharing with us his experiences of protecting this much-beleaguered raptor, which has been all but wiped out as a breeding species in England.

Field Meetings

Raptors at Derwentdale

March (dateTBA)

Ron Blagden will once again be leading this popular trip to the Derwent Valley looking for raptors. March is one of the best times to see displaying birds of prey, and, weather permitting, goshawk, peregrine, buzzard, sparrowhawk and kestrel are all likely, as well as the chance of something rarer.

Date TBA - keep your eye on the website for more details, or phone Ron Blagden on 01246 583522.

Minibus field trips

For information on forthcoming minibus field trips, please contact Paul Medforth on 01246 418120.

OTHER GROUPS' DATES TO NOTE

20th Feb - South Yorkshire Natural History Day. Treeton Community and Resource Centre. See page 4 for more details.

26th Feb - Derbyshire Ornithological Society Indoor Meeting. Keith Offord will give a talk entitled "Raptorophilia". Friends Meeting House, Chesterfield, 7.30pm.

4th Mar - RSPB Sheffield Local Group Indoor Meeting. The talk will be "Birding around the Pyrenees", with Allan and Susan Parker. Central United Reformed Church, Sheffield. 7.30pm.

13th Mar - Derbyshire Ornithological Society / Buxton Field Club Indoor Meeting. Martin Butler will be talking on "Tigers to the Taj". Methodist Church Rooms, Buxton. 7.30pm

19th Mar - Derbyshire Ornithological Society Indoor Meeting. AGM, plus Steve Holliday (RSPB Midlands Director) giving a talk entitled "From Trent Valley to Tristan da Cunha". Evergreen Club, Allestree, 7.30pm

24th Mar - Sorby Bird Section Members' Night. Rescheduled from January. City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield, 7.15pm.

15th Apr - RSPB Sheffield Local Group Indoor Meeting. Peter Holden, of the RSPB, will be speaking on "A Celebration of Birds". Central United Reformed Church, Sheffield. 7.30pm.

Email peterjmella@googlemail.com with any bird-related events you may have to promote here.

Deadline for next Bulletin

The next Bulletin will be issued at the April Meeting. Please note that any items for inclusion in the Bulletin must be received by Pete Mella at peterjmella@googlemail.com (for preference), or 396 Loxley Road, Loxley, Sheffield S6 4TJ, by **Saturday 27th March**.

Bulletin by email

More members have now agreed to take their Bulletins by email in PDF format. This is now about one-third of membership and this will help funds in cutting down the cost of sending out Bulletins, as it saves both printing and postage costs.

It is appreciated that not all members have the email facility but many thanks to those who have and are willing to receive their copies in this way.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sorby Breck Ringing Group Report

The Sorby Breck Ringing Group's 2009 report is now available to download in PDF format from their website. It represents a record year for the group, who ringed over 15,000 birds in '09. The report also contains a number of features about the year's ringing activity, both in the local area and further afield, including a study of snowy plovers in Mexico.

It can be downloaded at www.britishringers.co.uk/2009-report.php

Phil Palmer lecture postponed

Apologies to those disappointed by the cancellation of Phil Palmer's much anticipated talk on Namibia in January, which was postponed due to the hazardous weather conditions. Phil's talk will now take place at a future indoor meeting.

South Yorkshire Natural History Day

20th February will see a get-together of amateur natural history societies in the region, at Treeton Community &

Resource Centre. Organised by Sorby Natural History Society, it will be an opportunity to meet and chat over a drink, with short presentations by societies and groups. Speakers include Geoffrey Wilmore (South Yorkshire Flora), Colin Howes, Monica Ward (South Yorkshire Badger Group), Ken Dorning (Sheffield Area Geology Trust), Celia Jackson (Moss Valley Wildlife Group), Derek Bateson (Potteric Carr Recording Group), Val Clinging, Michael Archer, YNU, Tom Higgingbottom, Jim Flanagan and Derek Whiteley.

The even is free, but booking is essential. To book, or for more details, contact Derek Whiteley at Derek@thedeatree.wanadoo.co.uk, or Beech Cottage, Wardlow, Derbys, SK17 8RP.

Volunteer needed for Rivelin Survey

The BTO Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS) is a simple transect method for monitoring bird populations along rivers and canals and has been running since 1998. Just two visits are required to record all the birds seen and heard.

Many volunteers find this survey very interesting and rewarding. Consequently, the waterways are often

become cherished and rarely become available for new volunteers, however, there is an opportunity for someone to take on River Rivelin (the stretch from Rivelin Mill Bridge to Malinbridge) owing to the previous volunteer moving out of the area.

If you are interested, please get in touch: 28 Raleigh Road, Sheffield, S2 3AZ, Tel. 0114 2557075 E-mail: bto-rep@fireflyuk.net

Dave Gains BTO Regional Representative

New look Bulletin!

As you've probably noticed, the Bulletin has had something of a makeover this issue. If you have any comments on its new look - positive or negative! - then please send them to the usual address.

New members

The group welcomes new members **Darren Roddis, Paul Hine, Richard Barnard, Stephen & Beth Cole and Ian Cockburn**. We hope you all enjoy your membership, and good birding!

LECTURE REPORTS

Nick Williams - From The Dummersee To The Camargue

December's speaker was Nick Williams, a well known British birder and photographer who has spent many years living in Europe, especially Germany.

His talk took us across Europe, and started at Dummersee, a large German lake which is home to over a hundred breeding species of bird. Nick shared slides of these species with us, including stunning photos of bearded tit, great crested and little grebe, reed warbler, cuckoo and sedge warbler, and perhaps most stunning of all were photos of the lake's breeding colony of black tern.

We were then whisked to nearby farmland, where black redstarts were very common, as well as crested lark,

blue-headed wagtail, whinchat, yellowhammer, snipe and redshank. Red-backed shrike could be found, although was declining in the area, and great grey shrikes were present all year. In nearby flooded "bird meadows" (as the locals called them), breeding godwits could be found, and ruff, garganey, teal and white stork were present.

A nearby quarry also proved to be a great spot for birds, with little ringed plover breeding in the pools, and Nick sharing with us an unforgettable encounter with a juvenile eagle owl. The adjoining woods housed breeding goshawks, which Nick was able to photograph.

After showing us a wonderful photo montage of a day in the life of the Dummersee, Nick took us on a whistle stop tour of the Netherlands, including the large spoonbill colony in Texel. From there we travelled to southern Germany, where the sights included alpine chough feeding from alpine bird feeders.

We then travelled to Greece, stopping at Delphi, where some of the birds on display included booted eagle and rock nuthatch. Nick showed us the huge mud nests of the latter, and shared some great photos of a bird he'd lured for a photo in the caravan park he was staying in, using melon pips.

Olivaceous warbler, scops owl,

isabelline wheatear and pratincoles were among the birds seen elsewhere in Greece, although Nick lamented the amount of hunting he encountered during the visit. Further exploration of Greece's lakes turned up a host of species including Mediterranean and Caspian gull, little, cattle and great white egret, Kentish plover, glossy ibis and black-winged stilt, to name just a few.

Our final stop was the Camargue in the South of France. The site is famous for being one of the few places in Europe to see flamingos, and we were shown some great photos of them, as well as

other species including night heron and purple heron. Fan-tailed warbler was very common here, and Nick showed us photos of serin and red-backed shrike taken at his campsite. He also discovered nesting bee-eaters in the less than glamorous environment of a nearby rubbish pit, and while he photographed these he was lucky enough to stumble across a rock sparrow.

Nick observed that tourism has grown immensely since he started visiting the Camargue in the 1970s, but as far as he can see this has had little effect on the

region's birds, and that the growth of rice farming is perhaps a bigger threat to them.

Finally Nick took us back to Germany as an end-note, making us jealous with shots of hawfinch and crested tit on his bird table!

Nick was thanked for an entertaining talk that mixed some great photography and use of music to give us a real taste of the locations he covered, and one that went down very well with the audience.

Pete Mella

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Twitchers' Field Trip, Nov 2009

A Cold but clear start to the day as we set off from Sheffield and headed out towards Lincolnshire. A brief stop just east of Tetney Village gave us good views of a group of Must Swans with 13 Whooper Swans mixed in, including 7 juvenile birds. Our first planned stop was at Saltfleetby at Theddlethorpe, and after a little confusion in finding the right area along the large Saltfleetby stretch of coast we found spot and made our way to the beach.

As we got onto the beach the Snow Buntings and Twite showed very well and didn't take much finding as several Photographers had their lenses trained on the flock. The mixed flock of 200+ consisting mainly of Snow Bunting and Twite with small numbers of Linnet mixed in was a first for some of the new members that were on the trip. On our way back along the beach just before heading back to the minibus we picked up 4 Shore Larks feeding very close to the path leading off the beach which showed very well. This was a welcome sight for most as we have been unsuccessful in finding them in the last couple of years at their usual haunts. Other birds present were a large flock of Carrion Crows sat on the beach, as well as Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Sanderling, Dunlin, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Common Gulls and a flock of 9 Common Scoter off shore flying south. Bullfinch and Long-tailed Tit were amongst the commoner Blackbirds and, Redwings in the scrub

just up from the beach.

As we all boarded the minibus after a successful stop we then headed north-west towards the Humber Bridge to Far Ings. As we passed through Ludborough a skein of Pink-footed Geese flew over the bus heading southeast probably to north Norfolk. As we got to Far Ings the weather took a turn for the worse and we started getting bands of rain coming through, but that didn't deter us, and after a very short and rewarding search for a 1st winter Red-necked Phalarope it showed itself in true Phalarope fashion coming very close before a short flight around the corner where it was relocated and continued to show well despite the strong wind and heavy rain at the time. We then stopped for lunch and picked up Woodcock passing overhead, Tree and House Sparrows, Goldfinch and Chaffinch amongst the common species on and around the feeders. Once everybody had finished lunch we set off to our next spot.

Alkborough Flats was the next stop and a new site for me and several others in the group and a relatively new site in a project to reclaim some of the Humber estuary flood basin. This 450 hectare site was flooded in 2006 by breaching the flood walls to create habitat for a number of marshland species. Our target species was Green-winged Teal which we did not find but we did have a fantastic sight of Golden Plovers taking off flocking in their thousands as well as

smaller numbers of Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Lapwing, and Redshank. Other birds included 2 Marsh Harrier, Teal, Fieldfare, Kestrel, Grey Heron, Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting.

Our last stop on the trip was Blacktoft Sands and after a very inconsiderate and erratic driver held us up we got to Blacktoft with about an hour before dusk, so we headed down to the singleton hide where we struggled for seats as usual but got good views of Water Pipits showing well with meadow Pipits and showing the difference and difficulties in confidently identifying them. Up to 3 Marsh Harrier showed well over the reedbeds and a barn Owl in the distance along the river bank. The rest of the reserve was somewhat quiet with small numbers of Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, Shelduck and Moorhen on the pools and small groups of Starlings congregated in the reeds prior to going to roost. As the light faded and the birding got even quieter we went back to the minibus and headed home as the sun set on another successful SBSG fieldtrip. Many thanks to Paul Medforth for organising and running yet another enjoyable fieldtrip with all the right birds in all the right places, looking forward to the next one.

Philip Ridsdale

New birds for the Sheffield Area in the 2000s

Pete Mella looks at the new birds recorded in the area during the last decade, and looks forward to the next...

Another decade over, and one that saw a good smattering of new birds added to the Sheffield area's growing list of species. Some were once in a blue moon vagrants, some rewarded the patience of gull- and wader-watchers, and some were southern species which will perhaps become more and more common as climate change kicks in...

May 2000 started things off with a summer-plumaged adult **spotted sandpiper** on the River Derwent at Chatsworth on the 30th, which had sadly departed by the following morning.

A **broad-billed sandpiper** turned up associating with a dunlin at Rother Valley Country Park on 6th July 2000. It was not only the first record of this Siberian wader for the Sheffield area, but the first for South Yorkshire, and it was only the second inland record for Yorkshire, after an individual at Fairburn Ings in 1996.

Finally for 2000, gull-watching in Derbyshire paid off with a late Christmas present in the form of an adult **Bonaparte's gull** on 27th December. The trans-

Atlantic migrant had first been seen just outside the area at Ogston Reservoir on Boxing Day, and was re-found by the same observer who toured Derbyshire's water bodies in search of a better look, finally connecting with it at Poolsbrook. The bird returned to Ogston for the evening roost and was viewed by many birders.

It's hard to imagine now that it's as late as 2001 that the Sheffield area had its first record of a bird that, while by no means common in the region, is now a regular occurrence – **little egret**. A single bird was seen flying north over Rother Valley Country Park on 17th August, and the 2001 annual report notes, "given the number of records of this species immediately to the S and N

of our recording area, the addition of little egret to the Sheffield avifauna is not surprising, and indeed overdue".

It is still scarce in the area, but is now an annually-recorded species, with 7 individuals recorded in 2008, and a bird found on the Don in the City Centre in 2009. It's surely only a matter of time before it breeds?

2005 saw a very nice surprise during a Common Bird Survey of Blacka Moor, with a male **Dartford warbler** found on 4th June, and subsequently seen by many observers. The same site also turned up singing males during the springs of 2007 and 2008, the latter year seeing the bird observed attempting to breed with a female whitethroat.



Cetti's Warbler at Bolehill Flash in Nov 2009 - one of the many seen in the Sheffield area in the winter of 2009/10

There has been a national trend for this species to increase its range northwards, although the harsher winters of 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 may have put a halt to this expansion.

In January 2006 **common rosefinch** was added to the Sheffield list, with a juvenile bird visiting garden feeders in a garden adjoining Graves Park. The bird was first spotted by the garden's owner while he was partaking in the Big Garden Birdwatch on 28th January, and it lingered until at least the 26th February.

The Sheffield area's egret quota was again increased in 2007, with a long-overdue **great white egret** seen over Leash Fen on the 26th September. It was the 4th record for Derbyshire and the first confirmed for the Sheffield Area, although there is one historical record of one at Clay Wheel Dam at Wadsley Bridge in 1868.

Rother Valley proved again to be a magnet for new Sheffield area species, with a drake **American wigeon**, which was found on 23rd April and stayed until 1st May.

The latter end of 2009 brought not one, but two, new species to the Sheffield

area. Firstly the third egret of the "noughties" arrived, with a **cattle egret** spending a day at Carr Vale on 25th October.

Secondly the long-anticipated first **Cetti's warbler** for the area was recorded at Pit House West on 1st November. In fact this saw the start of a remarkable series of records of the species in the area, which included birds at Carr Vale, Bolehill Flash, Bolehill Triangle Pond and Blackburn Meadows. The was just part of a major northern

"It's hard to imagine now that it's as late as 2001 that the area had its first record of a bird that, while no means common in the region, is now a regular occurrence..."

influx - outside the area birds were also reported at sites including Edderthorpe Flash, Potteric Carr, Pugney's Country Park and Wintersett Reservoir.

Cetti's Warblers were still present at Pit House West and Bolehill Flash until at least the end of January, surviving the freezing conditions the 2009/10 winter - and if they can survive that, they can

survive anything!

So what's next...?

The "noughties" were certainly an eventful ten years for the Sheffield area's bird life, but what of the next decade? After the three egrets, will other birds that are colonising from the south make an appearance, such as glossy ibis or squacco heron? Will we get an inland Pallas's warbler to join the smattering of yellow-broweds the area has seen? Will the SBSG area's gull-watchers be rewarded with with a laughing, American herring or even glaucous-winged gull? Or will the wader experts get a turn with greater yellowlegs or white-rumped sandpiper?

There's even the chance it will be something truly unexpected - an Amur falcon over Derwentdale? An eastern crowned warbler in the Botanical Gardens? A disorientated and storm-blown tufted puffin at Rother Valley?!

Ah well we can dream, can't we?

What's your prediction for the next bird for the SBSG area? Email your **s u g g e s t i o n s** to peterjmella@googlemail.com, and the best will be published in a future bulletin.



Manjith Kainickara. Used under Creative Commons Licence.

Could this be a sight in Sheffield's skies before the end of the 2010's?

Ring-necked Parakeets in Sheffield

John Kirkman looks at one of Sheffield's newest inhabitants...

It is instructive to witness the patchy but apparently definite arrival into Sheffield of the ring-necked parakeet; instructive in that it might both add colour to drab days and add to our local, annual and garden tick-lists, and be a cause of the concern that so often surrounds the spread of an introduced species.

The Bulletin and the Annual Report indicate it is visiting to, if not a regular presence in, Rother Valley Country Park, Heeley City Farm, Wadsley, Hunter's Bar and Millhouses. In mid-November 2009, friends in Bradway saw a pair in their neighbours' garden, and gave me a splendid photo of them.

Will we end with thousands, as in Richmond and Kew by the Thames; in every nook and cranny, like the collared dove?

Possibly not, if Natural England has its way. You might well be aware that the parakeet as been added to the list of birds that can be shot without special permission. The list is mid-teens in length, including three gull species, the wood- and feral pigeon and most of the poor old corvid family: magpie, jay, carrion crow, rook and jackdaw. Surprisingly, in view of their BTO concern, starling and house sparrow are still fair game.

To shoot a parakeet, or a sparrow, you have to be an "authorised person", the landowner or someone with an economic interest in the land. I'm not sure if this applies to the suburban freeholder as opposed to leaseholder. You have to have the reasonable belief(!) that the parakeets are a danger to your or public safety, damaging public health or threatening native wildlife.

Parakeets will not be polluting water supplies as might gull roosts on reservoirs, or attacking sickly lambs or

old sheep as crows or magpies reportedly do, which is enough to support Peak District farmers' reasonable belief that they can shoot corvids. A farmer cannot shoot corvids because he disapproves of them in general, but has to limit himself to particular birds behaving badly.

Natural England fears that parakeets might become as fond of commercially grown fruit as they are in Africa and India. Are your interests being damaged in a relevant way if your garden grows soft fruit for home consumption?

Parakeets are dominant birds, often consorting in groups, and are intelligent, adaptable

and resourceful. According to Natural England, other garden birds could be kept permanently at the back of the food queue and suffer accordingly, presumably in terms of winter survival,

"Will we end up with thousands, as in Richmond and Kew by the Thames...?"

and through parent birds spending so much longer feeding themselves that their youngsters are less well fed. Does this allow you to take a pot-shot?

The birds are hole-nesters, so woodpeckers, nuthatches, possibly starlings and even tawny owls could find breeding more difficult if the invaders become more than a thinly scattered curiosity. The argument would not be that the parakeets are evil, nasty creatures, but that they are a pressure that used not to be present, and would not be present but for the "artificial" releases and escapes. This is quite different from a sparrowhawk snatching birds from a feeding table, because it



M. Garner

Ring-necked parakeet in a Sheffield garden in January 2010.

always was present and, though bad for the particular bird taken, could have a beneficial effect on the whole species through natural selection, i.e. probably managing to catch mainly the poorest individuals.

So when the marauders appear in a garden or park near you, observe their efforts on other species and try to see if and where they nest. Collared doves seem to have filled a previously unoccupied niche; there seems very little evidence that their increase has brought about anything else's decrease. The jury seems to be out on the ring-necked but caution is advised.

Perhaps other readers could moment more fully on who would control them, how, and on what specific grounds.

Parakeets - colourful additions to the fauna or alien menace? Email your opinions to peterjmella@googlemail.com

RECENT SIGHTINGS

29th November 2009 - 31st January 2010

These records are largely unchecked. Records in bold require supporting details.

Great Northern Diver - One on main lake at Rother Valley CP from 29th Nov to 8th Dec.

Bittern - One regular at Pit-house West to 26th Jan at least; singles at Carr Vale on several dates One at Bolehill Flash on 12th Jan and one at Treeton Dyke on 31st.

Whooper Swan - Two at Pebley Pond on 2nd Jan. Nine at Thrybergh CP on 9th. Seven on the Main Lake at RVCP on 16th flew off south at 1000 hrs then, presumably the same, flew back north over Pit-house West at 1430 hrs.

Pink-footed Goose - Just one movement noted in December when c150 flew NW over Waverley Opencast on 9th. Several small movements in January included c200 NW over RVCP on 3rd; c200 NW over Silverwood on 6th and c210 NW over Silverwood on 21st. At Carr Vale NR, 90 landed in fields on 8th and remained to 16th "until the local shoot appeared". c150 flew NW over Ecclesall on 31st Jan.

Mandarin - 36 at Linacre Res on 7th Dec.

Wigeon - Largest counts were 160 at Carr Vale NR on 1st Jan and 142 on

the ice at RVCP on 2nd.

Pintail - A female at Centenary Way Riverside on 19th Jan was presumably the same one on the R Don in the Eastwood/Aldwarke area from 19th to 24th. A drake was on the Reserve Lake at RVCP on 23rd Jan.

Goldeneye - 21 at RVCP on 1st Jan; 20+ there on 11th.

Red-breasted Merganser - A fem/imm at RVCP on 6th and 8th Dec.

Goosander - Few notable counts other than 35 at Orgreave Lagoons on 22nd Jan and 22 at RVCP on 23rd.

Red Kite - One flew high over Dronfield on 2nd Jan. One flew east over Brightside on 7th.

Peregrine - Many reports from Sheffield City Centre in January.

Red Grouse - Some good counts with c250 in Upper Derwentdale and

300+ on Broomhead Moor on 3rd Jan; c250 in the Strines area on 12th.

Water Rail - Clearly brought into the open by the harsh weather, reports from several sites. Max count was 6+ at Bolehill Flash on 17th Jan.

Dunlin - One at RVCP on 1st/2nd Jan.

Ruff - One on „the lawns“ at RVCP from 23rd-26th Jan and again on 31st when it or another was also in fields near Barlborough.

Jack Snipe - Reports from five sites with a maximum of 3 at Bolehill Flash on 10th Jan.

Snipe - Reported from over twenty localities in January with counts of 10+ at: Bolehill Flash; Denaby Common; RVCP and Waverley Opencast. These were eclipsed however by a count of 80+ from Woodhouse Washlands on 2nd Jan showing, if proof were needed, the conservation value of that site.

Woodcock - Doubtless due to the harsh weather, reported from more than 20 localities with a max of 4 at Sheffield City Airport on 13th Jan.

Black-headed Gull - 1800+ roosted at Broomhead Res on 19th Jan and 1370 roosted there on 29th when c1500 were at Langsett Res.

Common Gull - 112 roosting at Broomhead Res on 24th Jan included one with a mantle almost Lesser Black-backed in colour.

Herring Gull - Best counts were 217 on the ice at Poolsbrook CP on 18th Jan and 138 roosting at Broomhead Res on 29th.

Yellow-legged Gull - An adult roosted at Middleton Moor on 6th Dec. An adult was on roofs by the R Don at Upperthorpe on



This was one of many **water rails** seen in the area, which were lured out into the open during the cold weather.

MA Smethurst



This roosting **tawny owl** was present at Fatty Boyn's Pond throughout January, posing well for stunning shots such as this.

5th Jan. Single adults were at Poolsbrook CP on 15th & 20th Jan.

Caspian Gull - A 'cracking' adult was on the ice at Poolsbrook CP on 15th Jan.

Glaucous Gull - A first-winter roosted at Broomhead Res on 16th Jan.

Great Black-backed Gull - A good count of 190 were on the ice at Poolsbrook CP on 18th Jan.

Ring-necked Parakeet - Regular reports of up to 3 from the Ecclesall/Ranmoor area and 4 over Moorgate, Rotherham on 12th Jan.

Skylark - Some unusually high counts (these days) included 30 at Beighton on 1st Jan; 32 near Treeton on 3rd; 45+ at Pebley on 20th and 60+ at Orgreave on 2nd and 21st Jan.

Stonechat - Other than regular reports from Silverwood Lagoon –

max 3 on 4th Dec; 2 were White Lee Moor on 29th Nov, one was at RVCP on 3rd Jan with another at Damflask Res on the same date. Two were at Woodhouse Washlands on 2nd/3rd Jan.

Fieldfare - Very widely reported from gardens during the hard weather. Flocks of 100+ were reported from Broomhead, Canklow, Ewden Beck, Thornhill, Sheffield Parkway, Ulley CP and Woodhouse Mill.

Redwing - 200+ were at Broomhead on 6th Dec. During the harsh January weather, maxima of 100+ were reported from Canklow, Handsworth, Norton Lees and Sothall.

Cetti's Warbler - Fears that our newest arrivals might succumb to the ice and snow eased after regular reports of singles at Bolehill Flash up to 23rd Jan at least and one at Pit-house West on 31st Jan.

Blackcap - Wintering birds reported from Botanical Gardens, Brincliffe Edge, Handsworth, Millhouses (up to 2), Oakwood, Sharrow, Uppertorpe, Whiston and Woodseats.

Chiffchaff - Wintering birds reported from Bolehill Flash, Carr Vale NR, Kilnhurst Ings, and R Don between Rotherham Centre and Eastwood.

Firecrest - One at Pit-house West

on 23rd, 26th and 29th Jan.

Brambling - Relatively few reports and generally small numbers. Best counts were c30 feeding in game crop in heavy snow at Baslow Edge on 2nd Jan and 19 at Lodge Moor on 19th. The most regular site throughout Jan was at Longshaw with a max of 10 on 10th.

Siskin - No large flocks other than c120 at Old Wheel Dam on 2nd Jan, 80+ at Broomhead Res on 10th and 50+ at Haywood Farm on 17th.

Common (Mealy) Redpoll - 1-2 were at High Hazels Park on 9th Jan. Thereafter, 1-3 were regular by the feeders at Longshaw from 17th to the month-end and one was at Pit-house West on 31st Jan.

Lesser Redpoll - Largest flocks reported were 130+ at Pit-house West on 8th Dec, 100 at High Hazels Park on 10th & 12th Jan and 150 at the nearby Waverley Opencast on 11th Jan.

Crossbill - Noteworthy flocks reported were 19 at Wharncliffe Wood on 1st Dec; 30 at Fearfall Wood on 7th; 46 at Wigtwizzle on 10th Jan and; 30 at Thornseat Delf on 17th. Things became more complicated on 26th Jan with a report (complete with sonogram) of 40+ "Glip" Crossbills at Howden Res. *[Look it up if you like, but I suspect that madness may ensue.]*

Corn Bunting - Regular reports from fields near the Pebley Inn with a max of 28 on 1st Jan.

David Williams

Records were received from the following observers, with apologies for any omissions:

MG Archer, S Ashton, B Bailey, S Bailey, SJ Barnes, MA Beevers, AR Bell, RP Blagden, K Borman, K Bower, SJ Branch, MC Brew, PL Brown, P Burke, R Butterfield, DM Bye, J Crooks, RJ Croxton, A Deighton, K Dutton, M Dyson, G Featherstone, MG Fenner, D Gains, M Garner, P Garrity, KR Gould, R Greasley, S Guymmer, A Hill, RD Hill, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, C Hurst, Alan Johnson, Anne Johnson, JE Kenward, J Kingsland, CL Leonard, P Leonard, C Measures, P Mella, M Miller, TH Minskip, R Nicholls, M Oxlade, NR Porter, MN Reeder, P Ridsdale, B Roberts, SJ Roddis, S Samworth, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, MA Smethurst, M Snook, B Spencer, CG Stack, CB Stride, SG Tebbutt, A Thompson, M Timms, R Twigg, SE Vickers, RV Walker, J Ward, RDR Williams, D Wood, D Woodriff, P Wragg, BTO Bird Track, Rotherham DOS, Sorby- Breck Ringing Group.

GIFT AID AND MEMBERSHIP

In recent years there have been changes to Gift Aid legislation, making it easier for charitable organisations to reclaim income tax on the contributions, including subscriptions, made by members.

The group is constantly looking for sources of income to offset the increasing costs of running the group, such as printing the excellent Annual Report, (the better it gets, in terms of photos etc, the more it costs) and also room hire for our Indoor Meetings.

Gift Aid is a means by which every basic rate tax-paying member can contribute to the group's income, courtesy of the Inland Revenue (what an incentive!). If you are about to pay your 2010 subscription and have not already filled in a Gift Aid form, please complete the tear off slip below, and return it to any committee member at an indoor meeting or send with subs to Jenny Kingsland by post. Alternatively, please send it to me at:

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White Edge Drive,
Baslow
Derbyshire
DE45 1SJ

At the end of the tax year I can then recover 22/78 of your subscription (£3.95). If you are a higher rate taxpayer, you can include the payment on your tax return, and get higher rate tax relief yourself.

Please take the time to do this, as we can potentially raise hundreds of pounds for the group.

*Ron Blagden
Treasurer*

GIFT AID FORM

NAME

Are you a basic rate taxpayer? YES/NO

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2010 became due in January. Some subscriptions remain unpaid!

We have a good programme of speakers planned for next year, and many local and more distant field trips are also in the pipeline. A copy of the Annual Report for the year prior to membership is also included. The subscriptions remain the same at £14 for individual members, £16 for family membership, and £7 for juniors (up to age 16), which I am sure you will see as good value for money. A subscription form is below. To renew, please see Jenny Kingsland at any meeting, or send your cheque payable to Sheffield Bird Study Group, together with a stamped addressed envelope for return of your membership card, to Jenny Kingsland, 52A Riverdale Road, Sheffield S10 3FB. For new members an application form is available at meetings, on the website, by phone to 0114 2660759 or by e-mail to jkingsland2@googlemail.com

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